

Opening Statement of the United States to the 19th Special Meeting of ICCAT

The United States would like to thank our EU and Italian hosts for convening this 19th Special Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

2014 has been a year of significant work for ICCAT, with a wide range of important issues discussed intersessionally. The United States was particularly encouraged by the significant progress of the Convention Amendment Working Group this year. We hope to continue this momentum and finish the amendment process in 2015. Clarifying the scope of the Convention and incorporating modern fisheries management principles, including the precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches within the Convention text, is critical to the continued success of ICCAT in meeting its conservation and management objectives.

Sound science is the foundation of sustainable management, and we must continue to ensure the SCRS has the best information available to do their work and strengthen the science underlying ICCAT management. In that vein, the United States applauds the SCRS for its milestone initiative in developing the SCRS Strategic Plan for 2015-2020. We also believe it is crucial to strengthen the dialogue between scientists and managers and look forward to further advancing the work of the Standing Working Group designed for that purpose. Additionally, ICCAT must continue to improve statistical data collection and support key research initiatives, including those needed to reduce uncertainties in stock assessments.

At this annual meeting, we expect the parties will again adopt management measures that follow the scientific advice for both bluefin tuna stocks, giving due consideration to the uncertainties in the assessment results, and that are consistent with the respective rebuilding plans. For the western stock, management measures must be robust under both recruitment scenarios, including providing for a high probability of continued growth in spawning stock biomass and allowing the strong 2003 year-class to continue to enhance the productivity of the stock. The United States supports management actions that will help resolve the uncertainty associated with the stock-recruitment relationship for western Atlantic bluefin tuna. We suggest that the measure be for two years given the timing of the next stock assessment.

ICCAT should also continue its work to support the conservation of sharks caught in ICCAT fisheries. A joint proposal by Belize, Brazil, European Union, Panama, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States would require all sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached. This would improve conservation by enhancing species-specific data collection and improving the enforceability of ICCAT's existing ban on shark finning. We are also mindful of scientific advice recommending that we take action to ensure recovery of porbeagle sharks and ensure that catches of shortfin mako sharks should not be increased above 2010 levels.

It is essential that we continue to strengthen adherence with ICCAT measures and improve the compliance review process, including taking meaningful measures to address non-compliance. Working together, we must continue our efforts to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, in particular by enhancing the monitoring of ICCAT fisheries with more frequent reporting of vessel positions through vessel monitoring systems and establishing programs to assist developing States in implementing their port inspection responsibilities. Finally, we must ensure effective and timely implementation of ICCAT's electronic bluefin tuna catch documentation system.

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to your leadership. ICCAT is becoming a stronger organization and the actions that can – and must – be taken at this year's meeting will continue this important progress. We look forward to working with you and our partners around this table to continue the momentum towards a stronger, more effective ICCAT that grounds its measures in science, holds all accountable to their obligations, and ensures the long-term future of all the stocks under its charge.